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Church Growth Consulting: Focusing on the 'Main' Thing or Boosting the Reproductive Quotient

R. Daniel Reeves

About the Writer

Dan Reeves has worked as a missiologist and congregational coach for more than 25 years. First ministering with Campus Crusade in Europe Dan and his wife, Ethelwynne, sought to create radical Christian communities among post-Christian university students. Then as a church consultant with the Fuller Institute in Pasadena, California, Dan worked closely with John Wimber and Carl George in the areas of congregational diagnosis, strategic planning, conflict resolution, team building, and problem solving and has helped train and certify fifty mid-career consultant interns. With his doctorate in Missiology from Fuller Seminary, Dan has also served as the President of the American Society for Church Growth and as the convener of the Council on Ecclesiology whose goal is to address the unnecessary fragmentation among Christian groups over the nature, function, and mission of the church.

*Dan has pioneered an innovative, relational, and team-based network strategy (Congregational Clusters); a LifeSystems approach to strategic mapping for congregations, and has published on such subjects as Church Growth, revitalization, team ministry, and strategic mapping. His latest book, *Life-giving Systems: How to Energize Your Church for Robust Ministry*, is co-authored with Gary McIntosh, and is scheduled for publication by Kregel in 2005. Dan and Ethelwynne have three children and six grandchildren and live in Arroyo Grande, California.*

Gleanings From 30 Years of Consulting.

When I started my career in consultation, I had just returned from Europe where I had been in frontline campus team minis-

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try to post Christian students. Our ministry was direct, simple and focused on, as Bud Hinkson, one of my early mentors, would say, "investing our lives in the changing of lives." After these exciting years of ministering to people who had almost no connection with the gospel, some French students didn't even know what the New Testament was, I returned to the US.

Here I began another type of cross-cultural spiritual ministry, working with churches and, while I was a student of missiology, had the great opportunity to work with one of the best, most intuitive consultants I have ever met, the late John Wimber, who was then the Director at Fuller Institute. I learned many principles from John that have stayed with me over my last 30 years of consulting. One piece of advice I remember well came when John and I were riding between assignments in Colorado during the summer of 1976. John had plenty of time, and I was eager to have this legendary consultant give me a basic lesson on church growth consulting. He said, "*Dan, help is not help unless it is perceived as help.*" Simple advice, but it has been proven true over and over again. Over the years, my consulting has shifted from the simple to the complex, but now, I, once again, see that simplicity of focus on the "main thing" is what is most important.

In consulting in the 21st century, the focus of much of our consultation inevitably involves helping churches make the various transitions ahead of them – transitions from institutional to missional, modern to postmodern and beyond, and transitions from the safe harbor of mono-culturalism to navigating new cultures. Often times making these transitions involves an "extreme makeover," and it may seem as though new skills and sensibilities are required, and they are. However, the "main thing" for me has not changed, but has become much clearer, simpler and more focused.

In this article, I want to challenge the complexity and mechanism of some of the consulting practices we have used and show how important it is to "keep our eye on the ball," and focus on the "main thing," – the "**reproductive quotient.**" What is the reproductive quotient? Very simply it is that evidence or measure that shows a congregation that it is meeting its God given assignment of winning and making disciples of Jesus Christ. As we help a congregation to raise its "reproductive quotient," we focus attention on four specific areas – **reproducing new disciples, new leaders, new units or teams, and new sites.** These are the measurements that matter most. As consultants, we should learn to excel at helping congregations boost their "reproductive quotient."

"Good things" That Are Not the "Main Thing."

However, before we look at the main thing, let's begin by looking at several goals and practices that can get us off track from pursuing the main thing. Donald McGavran often talked about "substitutes for reconciliation" as a way of emphasizing that churches can do many "good things," but these activities should not substitute for the "main thing." The following may be "good things" that consultants can do, but they are not "the main thing."

1. *A desire to be helpful and credible.* Despite Wimber's inspired axiom about help needing to be in the eyes of the beholder and the very natural desire on the part of the consultant to be helpful and bring positive change, we cannot focus on just doing a good job and the client being pleased and feeling helped. Of course, I am not saying we should not have as a goal being helpful and credible. What Wimber *was saying was that* if your client is not listening, understanding and receptive it doesn't matter how good your advice is. We must be concerned about the best interest of our clients, not ours, and we must be well prepared. However, it is easy to get caught up in the institutional culture and not challenge the heart of the ministry. It is possible that, although we are perceived as being helpful and having credibility, we may have helped them be a better organization but not helped them be a better missional movement winning, building and sending disciples.

2. *The need to clarify areas of confusion.* A strong case can also be made for bringing clarity as being the main thing in consulting churches, because in virtually every situation we discover a great deal of foggy thinking. I assume that, when I enter a congregation, I will encounter considerable confusion, whether leaders are aware of it or not. The most challenging assignments are often those where congregational leaders have convinced themselves that all they need is an upgraded program, or some fine tuning in a few areas.

I am aware that most of the time, when I'm called in, the presenting issues and problems are NOT those that I have been asked to address. Several times, I have been asked to help a church with staffing, only to discover that staffing is not their core issue and making staffing decisions is not going to help, clarify or change their situation.

One of the problems with going for the deeper, below-the-surface issues is that the leaders may not understand why as a consultant you are encouraging them to modify their direction. They tend to get impatient with the consultant's apparent reluctance to deal with their main perceived need. Even worse, they

may question the consultant's motives and see this as the consultant's way of extending the contract.

In one church, the stated need was to decide on which staff positions to add, but the unstated issue was that many leaders wanted to get rid of the senior pastor; (in fact, this has happened on more than one occasion). However, the real issue turned out to be one of control, lack of trust, and although they said they wanted to grow as a church, their desires were more to keep the church going and to maintain the church programs rather than to reach the lost.

Again, clarifying areas of confusion are essential, but unless they end up focusing the church on "the main thing," a consultation can be derailed or, on the other hand, the client may be very satisfied, but, in actual fact, few deep systemic changes that matter have taken place.

The goal of providing hope. Another worthy goal of consultation that is often mistaken for the main thing is to provide hope, where there is discouragement and despair, so that a church can continue with its work. When churches are stalled and stagnated, there will be leaders who are discouraged with the lack of forward momentum and proactive thinking. Without providing some kind of realistic hope, the consultation will not be evaluated as helpful. In growing congregations, we provide hope by showing leaders how it is possible to accomplish so much more. If, for example, we can help their teams break through on one or two key issues, their hope of greater impact in other areas will also likely increase.

Recently, I consulted with a small congregation that had, for all practical purposes, cut off communication with denominational leaders. Trust had been completely eroded because two years earlier the church elders had wanted to hire a pastor who felt called to lead them forward. However, the local district leaders didn't think this was a wise decision and withheld their approval. From that time on, despite visits from local and regional leaders, the church chose to isolate themselves, distrusting their denomination. They finally agreed to see an outsider and after a time of prayer and listening, the elders were able to consider a wide range of possibilities.

Later in the week, "miraculously," circumstances happened where the elders contacted and met a local pastor, who just happened to be in vocational transition. The pastor told them he had actually been thinking about this congregation for some time. After talking and then interviewing, the pastor was in fact interested in serving the church on a part time basis and the church was delighted the several strong points the interview revealed

made this relationship a good fit.

With my brief involvement and recommendation the district has approved the selection. He is now preparing to serve the congregation for at least two years. Most importantly, the relationship between the district leaders and the elders is on a realistic path of restoration. Whereas two months ago there was virtually no hope, in a matter of several exchanges there is now considerable hope.

As a consultant it was very satisfying to see prayers answered, to help a ministry get back on track and to have people be encouraged and regain hope. However, it is not the "main thing."

When Our Strategies and Tools Become the "Main Thing."

Another aspect of consulting that may take us away from the "main thing" is our methodology. Although it is important to use proven strategies and tools, we cannot become too reliant on them because, again they can be a "substitute" for the "main thing." It is very easy to do this because our clients often like the tools of consultation because it appears that something credible, scientific, or strategic is being done and they will end up with a blueprint for success.

As I said at the beginning, in my consulting career, I have gone from simple to complex and back to simple. I started my ministry on a team in Berkeley, California and soon afterwards, I went to Europe with a team of University grads under the leadership of Bud Hinkson, who always focused on the "main thing." While I was there, I traveled with a musical evangelistic team to universities all over Europe and then pioneered and directed Campus Crusade's ministry in France. During my time there, I was focused on the goal from which Bill Bright never sidetracked – *win, build, and send disciples*.

It was in Europe that I met Peter Wagner at the Lausanne Conference and church growth made sense to me because it, too, had the "main thing" at its core. I returned to the states and began to study missiology with Wagner, McGavran, Kraft, Tippet, Orr, Winter and Glasser. At the same time I met John Wimber who invited me to join the Fuller Institute, which for many years following was the premier church consulting organization in the country and its demise was one of my greatest disappointments in my consulting career.

At the beginning, our tools were fairly simple and our interactions with our clients intensive, our reports were informal. Gradually, I tended to move away from the simple and began to use all sorts of formal assessment tools, surveys, demographic

data, spent hours analyzing them with the leadership, and wrote 50 to 100 page reports. I followed the trend to spend most of the consulting time on assessment. Unfortunately, many congregations never get beyond diagnosis. One church I consulted happily spent seven entire years looking at the diagnosis and recommendations after the consultation was over.

I was painfully reminded of that stage of consulting when last year we sold our house, and I had to empty the garage. I discovered boxes full of reports I had written for churches replete with graphs and charts and results of congregational surveys. I wondered if these reports were, also, in boxes of church basements or tucked away in a pastor's filing cabinet. What was their impact? An associate of mine, Nancy Pfaff, did do research for her master's degree at Fuller on how the churches I had consulted were doing. Fortunately, the reports were favorable, but I still wish that I had used more of the time to help move them into implementation.

Now, I only use formal assessments, surveys, pie graph demographic data when they give a sense of security to the client or if there is a need to gather specialized information or information that the church does not have on hand. In the last few years, I have developed a "Colombo" style of consulting, poking around, listening, "pulsing" groups, asking questions rather than relying too much on formal assessments and I work on helping the church focus on or refocus their vision and mission. I now tend to do "napkin analyses" as I interview leaders and congregation members to find how they are doing in – generating spiritual energy, developing effective leadership, increasing people flow and charting amid change. In this process, I am able to get information that would not show up on a congregational survey and much more – including measuring their reproductive quotient.

I do not give written reports, either, unless the client begs for them and is willing to pay a premium for one (which is designed to discourage them and usually does). Instead, I give an initial verbal report at the end of my first visit to "examine the body." The leaders take notes, write their own report and use the information to help them create strategies and recommendations of their own.

I have developed convictions and biases that have been formed from thirty years of consulting, coaching, mentoring and coming alongside denominations, churches and individuals, and I am upfront with them when I consult. I, also, have developed some tools and approaches that have served me well, but they are not fixed sets, but have fuzzy boundaries and can be adapted

to a variety of situations.

Although those we serve look to us for help, clarification and hope, and, often want assessments, surveys and documentation, we cannot allow ourselves to believe that is enough. They cannot either be the "main thing", or seen as an end in themselves.

What is the main thing? – Measuring and Boosting the "Reproductive Quotient."

As church growth consultants we cannot afford to waver or waffle on "the main thing." Our primary calling or "the main thing" is to encourage *fruitfulness* and *reproduction* in ministries. Fruitfulness and reproduction are familiar words, but they are often difficult to describe and measure in practice. Church health has been touted as the thing to measure, and there are many church surveys that focus on health issues in the church. Although the health of the church is important, it is not the "main thing," and can be a diversion from the role of the church to be fruitful. I would agree with those who argue that a healthy church is a fruitful, reproductive church; however, the focus on health and assessing health has tended to make some churches more inward focused and has often given them a false sense of security. However, although, churches must be healthy, the "main thing" consultants need to focus on is what I call the "reproductive quotient" of the church. As church growth practitioners, one of our main assessment tasks is to identify and measure what a church's reproductive quotient is and this can continue to be measured year after year. But, the central zone, or bull's eye, of our consultant ministries is to help churches focus on identifying the most significant reproductive activities and people and help them "boost their reproductive quotient."

The four factors that determine a congregation's reproductive quotient are:

- new disciples
- new leaders
- new teams/units
- new sites/plants.

Some Advantages of Using these Terms

As specific categories, reproductive activities have several advantages over the more standard church growth terms, such as expansion growth, extension growth and bridging growth (growing larger, or planting churches nearby, or across cultural barriers, respectively).

1. Reproductive categories are easily defined and easily measured.

New Disciples

New disciples are made in all sorts of ways and places, such as in bible studies, in the workplace, or by involving pre-believers in church specialty teams where they have expertise (i.e. music, drama), and not just if they walk through our front door on Sunday. I have elsewhere talked about 'people flow,' - people coming through the front doors, the side door and, as my friend Dave Ferguson has said, the back door. Also, many think that discipling is synonymous with educating. But to boost the reproductive quotient of a church in the area of new disciples, educating will produce better educated disciples but not necessarily reproductive disciples. This doesn't mean that there should be no educating, but we need to look at new realities and methodologies. Disciples can 'grow' as they 'go,' with the emphasis on 'go.' Too many of us keep our disciples in hot houses until people become more intrigued by theology than the gospel and lose that initial excitement of knowing Christ. I have seen, over and over again, individuals who were excited about becoming a Christian and anxious to pass on the good news to others only to see these same people later separating themselves from other Christians, arguing Calvinism over Armenianism, following a particular individual in the way they wanted first to follow Jesus. 'Growing as we go' involves among other things, mentoring, being on a team where team members care for each other spiritually while they work on the mission, allowing for relational learning opportunities, building our lives into each other, encouraging each other to become 'self feeders' in God's word and prayer.

Most pastors use the term "*disciple*." But, we cannot assume that everyone means the same thing when they use the phrase "new disciple." A pastor in one of my revitalization clusters enthusiastically shared recently how his leadership team had just set a goal to have their existing members go through a course on Christian discipleship. He was calling those who completed the course, "new disciples." However, when Donald McGavran spoke of the priority of making *new* disciples, he was not referring to the recycling or renewing of existing Christians, but rather the process whereby non-Christians turn toward Christianity and are initially converted)¹

Erwin McManus, who is the pastor of Mosaic in Los Angeles and a new prophetic voice in the twentieth century, likes to tell a story about discipleship in the church. He says that a church called him and told him that they needed help in evangelism

and asked him to come to help them. They added that they were doing a good job in discipleship but they were weak in the evangelism area. As Erwin worked with them, he had to tell them something that he strongly believed. He said that they could not be doing a good job in discipleship if they were not doing a good job in evangelism, because a disciple is one who goes and makes disciples.

So new disciples are new followers of Christ, and disciples are those who, as part of being followers of Christ, make new disciples. For church growth consultants making new disciples has been, and must remain our most fundamental passion and calling.² The Great Commission is not, as some have inferred, the "great suggestion" nor can consultants afford to be side tracked from this "main thing."

New Leaders

We have not been as precise in church growth circles in defining *new leaders* as we have in defining new disciples. In many churches, however, leaders have often been *appointed* because of their administrative skills or because they have been Christians or faithful church members for a long time. For me, new leaders are those who *identify* themselves by their passion for Christ and the desire to gather a team around them and move out in ministry. For this to happen, church leadership needs to be willing to invest in and take risks with people and create and nurture a climate for encouraging, empowering and releasing leaders. Regrettably, too many churches, often without realizing it, have a culture that maintains the 'status quo' where control is the *modus operandi* and squelching of anything or anyone new and different is routine. Instead they wait for people to 'mature' and prove themselves and go through the political system before being approved.

In many congregations the guidelines for overseers and deacons detailed in chapter three of I Timothy are intended in practice to apply to most leaders. However, I am now convinced that the mere reluctance to use the term 'leader' for anyone who does not meet these strict requirements, is a fairly significant inhibitor of reproductive activities³. It rules out all sorts of people, especially new leaders who are initiating and moving in mission. In fact, squelching leadership in those who have not passed the litmus test of theology, age, familiarity with 'our way of doing things,' or longevity in the church can obviously reduce the reproductive quotient of a church. It is better for a church to take a risk on a person and not have things work out, than to repel or discourage potential leaders. In these cases where few feel free to

step forward in leadership, many feel forced to leave and search for another church where leadership opportunities are more abundant..

One of a consultant's jobs is to help churches build a climate where leaders can emerge early and quickly. The concept of 'leadership' needs to be detached from position and title and, instead, developed and encouraged in people at all levels. In churches that are reproducing leaders quickly, the distinction between who is a volunteer and who is on staff is almost irrelevant and, other than the lead pastor, it may be hard to tell who is paid and who is not. Measuring how many more leaders have actually emerged should be easy (vs. how many produced). In the last year, how many persons have identified themselves by their passion for Christ and are moving out in ministry, forming teams that have some role in the church's goal of making new disciples, whether it is by starting a bible study for surfers at the beach, creating another worship group, refurbishing a room for the youth, or leading a summer mission?

New Units and Teams

New units are any kind of small group that is formed for the first time. *New teams* are groups of individuals who have not served together previously, that form in order to accomplish a specific mission.⁴ Again, many churches can be stuck in old organizational structures some of which no longer serve the purpose for which they were created. It is easy to measure the expansion of new teams from year to year. Most of the leading reproductive churches, for example, New Hope, Hawaii, Mosaic, Los Angeles, and Community Christian Church, Naperville, focus on getting people into the action and mission of the church and teams form around the passions and visions of its members as well as its leadership.

As a coach to churches wanting to shift to teams, I tell them, "Don't just try the concept for a few weeks to see if things will work, but see it as a process." I use the metaphor 'crossing the bridge' as a way to describe the shift and to help them assess where they are in moving towards the goal, "getting to the other side of the bridge". When leaders first commit to cross the bridge and to make the reproduction of missional teams the heart and soul of their ministry, I encourage them to not stop in the middle. It is self-defeating to start this as an experiment or do it on a trial basis. Likewise they shouldn't conclude that teams do not work until they have given these new skills and strategies a fair chance. Helping a large church with established patterns of ministry and structure create team ministry is much more difficult

than helping a church that is starting from scratch. A church plant where they have fewer preconceived ideas, no established patterns, a higher potential for excitement, and fewer risk factors can move out in new ways. But for a large church, the process takes more time and intentionality. You can't just "install" teams in your church. Teams are not a replacement for an organizational system. They are both relational and task-oriented, and they reproduce themselves. They function to help individuals and the church 'go as they grow' and are discipleship and mission based. They become the heart beat of the church.

However, there are some steps an established church can take if they want to do a total overhaul and give team ministry a fair chance. First, the leadership team needs to begin to think and operate within a missional teams framework. At the same time, they need to initiate a few missional teams at the grass roots level with early adopters to see what kind of results occurs, and how the members of these teams evaluate the overall experience. Then, they can discuss whether this approach makes enough sense to embrace it as an overall framework for doing future ministry. After that, the leadership team should share these ideas and experiences with influencers and with persons of authority in the congregation and invite them to see what is happening and to be part of the process. A church, depending on its polity, may have to officially adopt teams as the means of doing ministry. One of the things we offer as a service is an all church leadership [in its loosest sense] retreat to introduce and help the leaders and congregation make this transition in thinking, and begin to look at their own ministry and involvement. Next, the leadership team can initiate a two year strategy of reproducing missional teams throughout the congregation. After two years, the leadership team can make a realistic assessment as to whether a missional teams, framework is a good fit. This multiple step process I refer to as "crossing the bridge" all the way. The temptation is to turn back when people encounter the first round of discouragement or resistance. In most cases, this discouragement is a matter of normal awkwardness in thinking about ministry in a new way, and attempting to break some of the old habits, such as failing to give new leaders adequate permission and affirmation.

New Sites and Plants

New sites are new locations for the same church. Some churches are now able to facilitate several dozen sites with the same leadership team and a single budget. These new sites are not autonomous and on their own, but benefit from being part of

a community of churches that share resources, creativity, pastoral staff, administrative structures and create a synergy that helps in the reproduction of other sites. Multi-site churches reproduce themselves in different areas in the city, and some of them are also producing sites in other geographical locations. On the other hand, *new plants* are designed to function independently, as soon as that is realistic. The best new plants are most usually ones where teams are sent out to start a church rather than having a couple go out on their own. However, in most cases, new sites are less costly to initiate and have fewer risks than new plants. I personally consider them the preferred option over expansion or extension in most situations.⁵

Each of these four reproductive activities are easily measured. Although some teams are still required to report their activities on regular written forms, the better way is through relational coaching sessions in small groups of pastoral peers. When a positive, encouraging environment has been established, sharing of reproductive goals with corresponding activities and disappointments occurs without a sense of competition or intimidation. Accountability is not overbearing when it happens within an affirming climate of acceptance and trust.

2. A second advantage of reproductive terms, such as teams and sites, is that they are more potent and more helpful terms for most lay persons today than terms such as expansion and bridging.

Virtually all congregations have the capacity to increase fruitfulness and to accelerate the multiplication of ministry. Yet pastors and leadership teams are often not aware of what changes this will require in the way they are currently thinking about and doing ministry.

One of my central aims in every consultation is therefore to convince the leadership team of the necessity to “boost their reproductive quotient.” In my interviews, I spend considerable time probing and discerning readiness in each specific area:

- How have you been doing the last three to five years in finding and folding new disciples? What are the most common patterns and trends in enlisting new disciples?
- How do you select leaders when you form new groups or new teams or how are new teams and groups formed?
- How often have you been able to reproduce groups and teams during the last five years? How many groups and teams did you have then compared to how many you have now?

- What have been some of the difficulties you have encountered in attempting to reproduce disciples, leaders, groups and teams?
- Has consideration been given to launching new sites in other locations? If so, how far along are you in this process? If not, would you be open to hearing how multi-site ministry has been helping other congregations minister to more lost and broken people?

One of the reasons that the reproductive quotient in most congregations is so abysmally low is that these four categories are not seen as the main thing. For some churches membership is the main thing. Although adding new members may be important, adding new disciples needs to be the primary focus. For others, the maintaining and running of programs may be the main thing and finding volunteers for these is crucial. Yet others may be focused on organizational effectiveness and financial stability. Making new disciples, developing and releasing leaders, creating teams that participate in shaping and playing out the vision, and reproducing themselves in new sites and plants may actually seem to be at cross purposes with the main focus of some churches. As consultants, we have to ask ourselves if we are being sidetracked into only providing help in areas that, although they may be important to the life of a church, are not the main thing for the church. Admittedly, church consultants often measure and assess indicators of health in the church; however, even here, the focus on the reproductive indicators is not as sharp as it might be. In order to help restore the center of church growth consultation let us ask ourselves:

- When we clear up an area of confusion in congregational consultations do our explanations somehow encourage the leadership team towards activities that will boost their reproductive quotient? For example, when we focus on worship, we look at how worship can be stimulate or boost reproductiveness in these four areas. Can a pre-Christian be incorporated into the worship team, such as helping with the sound, and at the same time be loved and mentored on his or her path to being a new disciple? Can we add a specialty team or two, such as a new music team or a team that works on the environment for worship?
- When the help we offer is actually perceived by leadership teams as help, does this help involve or is it somehow linked to potential activities for reproducing new disciples, new leaders, new units, new

teams, new sites or new plants (the critical reproductive zone)? For example, when we are able to restore the broken relationships between several valued staff members, is it possible that at least one of them is being prepared to initiate a new site or a new plant in the not too distant future?

- When we encourage leaders with hopeful illustrations do we attempt to connect these hopes to existing teams or teams that need to be birthed to better address these reproductive functions? For example, when we assure a congregation that they have enough energy left for one good run at the mountain, do we make ourselves available to coach them in how they can gather enough prospective followers of Christ to make that a reality?

Case Studies – What Are Examples of Congregations Who have Determined to Make “The Main Thing the Main Thing?”

New Disciples.

New Hope Oahu - Honolulu, Hawaii: Senior Pastor, Wayne Cordeiro.

Without a doubt New Hope Oahu is the most intentionally and effectively evangelistic church I have been seen in North America. Evangelism permeates the DNA of every leader, yet not in the vague conventional sense of living the life or bearing witness that characterize so many other congregations that talk evangelism. I have spent more of my own time and money during the last four years studying this congregation than any other. As a people flow specialist I have never seen anything quite like it. Much of what they do defies conventional descriptions and categories.

Every member of every team at New Hope sees his or her role as critical to, and directly related to, the salvation of souls. This is true even though they are not often involved verbally in the process of proclaiming Christ or in offering an invitation for another person to receive him as Savior and Lord. Most of the believers at New Hope have been so radically transformed that their lives are simply contagious. Each team member sees his or her role behind the scenes as technical assistant, or raking leaves, or intercession, as just as important to the overall task of reaching a soul as those who are up front in a more visible role of communicating the gospel. In fact the stated purpose of the church is “to present the Gospel of Jesus Christ in such a way that turns non-Christians into converts, converts into disciples, and disci-

ples into mature, fruitful leaders who will in turn go into the world and reach others for Christ."

Because all team members are in groups which feed regularly on God's word, they are so alive in Christ, that they are very comfortable in talking about what they are learning in natural ways with those around them. They are also just as comfortable in inviting their friends and family members to come to New Hope for a weekend service. In fact, invitations are what every member seems to do very simply and very effectively. With great enthusiasm, they simply say, "You've got to come to my church. Just try it one time. I know you will like it, just like I did." And for many persons, that's all it takes.

Even people who do not attend New Hope are aware of their intention to have a positive impact on the entire Island of Oahu. The people of New Hope live out their faith in practical ways, and they have as a goal that people in Honolulu will say, "we want New Hope to stay in our community because . . ." They hold their services with 8,000+ attendance at a high school. At first, some teachers were not very excited to have their rooms used by the church and some refused. However, as time went by, teachers were clamoring for their room to be used, because the rooms were left in better condition than they had been left. The church gave them computers and fixed problems that they saw. Also, residents of the island see people daily reading their Bible's with great interest at the beach and at Starbucks. They know this is not some kind of a cult, or a temporary, superficial program because they also hear multiple stories from those in their workplace whose lives have been positively transformed. They want to find more about the church with 'heart.' Now seekers can attend at one of the many multi-sites throughout the island.

New Leaders.

Mosaic - Los Angeles, California: Lead Pastor, Erwin McManus

I knew when Erwin walked into the Council on Ecclesiology on the second day in Escondido, California, in March 2001, that there was something quite different about him from anyone else in the room. Participants were having a heated discussion on the compromised church. Everyone else was thinking in terms of white or black, or from within the boundaries of a distinct theological tradition. Erwin sized us up and our first days thinking a little too quickly. He was not impressed with our conclusions. We had the best of *Christianity Today*, World Vision, Willow Creek, Asbury Seminary, Dallas Seminary, Fuller Seminary, and

the National Association of Evangelicals. Even some of his fellow Southern Baptist authors were in the room! How could he think so differently?

I had invited Erwin to participate in the Council on Ecclesiology project and I was to come to get to know much more about him. He has gone on to write, (actually he dictated – normal people write), the most impressive trilogy on team building and ecclesiology in my library. Today, Erwin and Alex McManus are both valued partners in the Council on Ecclesiology and Mosaic will host our gathering in May, 2006 and our relationship continues to be built on common passions about how to develop missional leaders in turbulent and complex urban settings

As I have been able to meet Erwin's leadership team up close and I have come to appreciate more of just how uniquely God has wired and prepared Erwin as a prophetic leader for these times. He has produced leaders and leadership teams that have reproduced themselves in a tough and difficult mission-field from UCLA to Pasadena's Rose Bowl to USC's Coliseum and throughout the vast San Gabriel and San Fernando valleys. In these ethnically diverse and rapidly changing areas, few have been able to overcome the multicultural and contextual barriers to reach out to the LA metro area as Mosaic has. Mosaic's front-line disciples and leaders unpack worldviews in the marketplace routinely as though this is the normal Christian life. They continue to communicate compellingly with diverse worldviews in more than a hundred life groups spread throughout the L.A. basin.

Another factor in Mosaic's exceptional capacity to reproduce new leaders is their innate ability to ask for *radical commitment* and to turn on a dime as the occasion of mission calls for it. For example, the leadership team at Mosaic does not have to work at getting out of an institutional box like most normal congregations do. Creativity oozes from every pore. During one leadership retreat with several hundred of Mosaic's young leaders, my wife and I witnessed their entire ministry go through a metamorphosis in a matter of minutes without chaos or confusion. The leadership dispensed with traditional membership and instead called all those who were fully behind and working the Mosaic vision and mission be 'staff' as a recognition that they were shoulder to shoulder with the paid staff in the mission of the church.

The emerging leaders at Mosaic prefer the raw and spontaneous over the refined. They certainly don't see themselves as restricted or confined, but rather are energized, motivated, mentored, and encouraged in a community totally committed to

the gospel of Jesus Christ. Certainly, most post-moderns resonate with this new beat. They resist anything that will prevent them from carrying out Christ's mandate to a lost and broken world. I've seen the leaders at Mosaic rise to the responsibility of nurturing the movement that is being drawn to Erwin's prophetic writings and Erwin's speaking engagements such as his year long commitment to exhort men in Promise Keepers gatherings across the nation. The mostly young leadership give up time and money to help in all aspects of the work including their annual Origins conference which shares the vision of Mosaic with pastors and leaders across the country.

Mosaic does not produce leaders because their standard for leadership is low. On the contrary, Mosaic's standards for leadership are now higher than many other congregations, including those who require staff to hold graduate degrees. In doing this they are not being prescriptive and restrictive, but they keep encouraging each leader to raise their standard of leadership rather than yielding to the pressures to lower. The clear and compelling gospel vision, a call for radical commitment, a focus on becoming more Christ-like, and the setting high personal goals have attracted young urbanites to Mosaic with the result that they have become followers of Jesus and leaders in the Mosaic community. Mosaic makes sure that, as the church grows, that these leaders do not move away from their core apostolic ethos.

Thanks to the leadership of Erwin and Alex McManus and their leadership teams, Mosaic is a coalescing global force with creativity as its flaming, indefinable core. A second-generation textbook of leadership development and missiology is being written. And North American Christianity is increasingly paying attention.

New Units/Teams

Sunset Presbyterian Church – Portland, Oregon: Senior Minister: Ron Kincaid

Sunset Presbyterian Church (SPC) is a large suburban congregation on the west side of Portland, Oregon. I first received a call from Ron Kincaid in May 2002, because he heard that I might be able to help SPC make the shift to team ministry. I agreed to meet with their entire leadership team for two full days of interviews. However, I sensed early in our initial telephone conversation that this would not be easy. Two obvious reasons were their size (3,500 weekend attendance in five services), and their Presbyterian polity. The PC/USA Book of Church Order is thicker than the policies and procedures manual used by any other denomination. Also, Presbyterians are well

known for seeking to do things “decently and in order.” To help SPC, a large, established mainline church, with an embedded, historic and theologically based structure, make the shift to creating and reproducing ministry teams would be challenge.

The good news is that everyone I met at SPC was determined to “cross the bridge” as far as teams were concerned. All of the groups that Ron and his team had assembled were eager to learn to think and operate in an entirely different way from a traditional Presbyterian church. The bad news is that I could not hand them a program or diagram explaining systemically how all of this works in practice. This lack of instant transfer was frustrating for them—and for me. Like many large mainline congregations in major cities, SPC was filled with many engineers from high-tech industries who were used to seeing plans with clear schematics. When I would use phrases like “this is something you must first experience to comprehend,” or “this is more relational than hierarchical” the eyes of many of them would glaze over. Unfortunately, much of their training in human resources management slowed down the communication process. Bill Gates and the apostle Barnabas view teams through radically different lenses.

I told them that it would take about two to three years before this new way would become second nature. Those two years have passed, and I am happy to report that Ron and his team have crossed the bridge. They are more convinced than ever that teams are both biblical and effective in becoming a reproductive church. If such a radical metamorphosis can be successful at SPC, that should bring hope to any congregation in America. Sunset Presbyterian, with this high level of difficulty, has demonstrated that any church can make the shift to missional teams if they are willing to commit to the necessary steps involved in such a radical shift and Sunset was. Credit has to go to Sunset Presbyterian’s leadership, commitment, prayerful effort, creative thinking and desire to be reproductive for the fact that two years after they began, they have a thriving team ministry in place.

New Sites/Plants

Community Christian Church, Naperville, Illinois: Lead Pastor, Dave Ferguson

Dave Ferguson and I met several years ago during a gathering in the office of Christianity Today. Dave Travis of Leadership Network had invited Dave and his team to present his new concept of multi-site ministry to a group of us who were serving on an ad hoc group known as the Church Champion’s editorial board. Dave Ferguson’s ideas about one church in more than one

location clearly had some new twists. In fact, it seemed liked they had actually discovered a long awaited breakthrough.

Dave invited me to meet with his leaders for several sessions during the next year. I got to know their hearts, their vision, and the particular way they think. Clearly, Dave is being raised up by God as one of the new leaders of the emerging global church. In addition to being lead pastor at Community Christian Church, he is shaping a fast moving multi-site movement called "New Thing."

Dave is an exceptionally quick study. He has incorporated most of the best practices from the past, but more importantly, those innovations that we are just beginning to glimpse from the future. It didn't hurt Dave to have Lyle Schaller living in his hometown, constantly encouraging him to try this thing called multi-site. But Dave and his team have much more going for him than just the Dean of consultants living nearby. They know how to think about and put into action ways to reproduce new sites in a way that very few pastors and their teams do. He has integrated the best of Wayne Cordeiro, Erwin McManus, and Randy Frazee, just to mention a few. And Willow Creek, Mosaic and New Hope have all received innovative ideas from him that enabled them to seize their own futures more quickly. I will never forget how Troy [the physically largest member of Dave's team], almost knocked me over during our initial session in his eagerness to ask me, "Can you show us how to go faster?" I don't recall ever having had a planning question phrased quite like that. The team under Dave's leadership has a high-speed reproductive process that is as unobtrusive as breathing. They assess, then accelerate, assess again, and then accelerate even more.

Dave and his team are an example of an advanced consulting approach that I now call *relational partnering for kingdom impact*. These are relationships that a consultant establishes for no other reason, financial or otherwise, than to advance the kingdom. Some of the greatest results for the kingdom, in recent years, have come from establishing relationships with the leading thinkers and practitioners in the church with whom I resonate. I enter into them with no expectation or intention of creating a consulting contract. Not only that, but I do my best to link these thinkers and practitioners with others who are on their wavelength but on the surface their ministries might not look to have much in common. Often, great synergy is created. My hope is that some of the strategic investments I make in dozens of relationships will lead to a few high impact strategies being developed between leading edge laboratories. The benefit for the church is that gifted leaders can reshape and articulate ideas

quickly and pass them on to many others. I affirm the value of lateral [peer] mentoring and see it as one of the things I am called to facilitate and to do myself. This is consulting where the whole is larger than the parts. The synergy that can be produced goes way beyond what one person can do. The potency of just a few tools and concepts developed in these crucibles has provided several conceptual and practical breakthroughs and confirmed many of the hunches which otherwise would have remained theoretical.

The benefit for the consultant is having peer-mentoring friendships with comrades in mission, examples and insights to share with others, and the pleasure of seeing the kingdom expanded around the "main thing." I have helped Dave by linking him to key laboratories, and by asking him direct strategic questions to help his church and movement stay on the edge of global Christianity. Dave helps me as an advisor on the counsel, with his exceptional discernment of how to leverage momentum. These relational partnerships, though risky and time consuming, have the potential to produce the highest kingdom impact of all consultant/change agent strategies. They influence directly or indirectly thousands of churches through conferences, articles, referrals and books.

Conclusion

In the preceding pages, I have highlighted some lessons I have learned since I observed my first church growth consultation in 1975 and made my case for focusing on "the main thing." My hope is that the collective wisdom gained from this retrospective, the case studies and the emphasis on our need to help churches boost their reproductive quotient (reproducing new disciples, new leaders, new teams and units, and new sites) will help us avoid unnecessary tangents and better prepare us to lean forward into unprecedented opportunities.

As change agents committed to coming alongside congregations, there is no greater responsibility or thrill than allowing the Holy Spirit to ignite sparks through us. How we approach our calling can either contribute to favorable, sustainable congregational change, or it can create a short-lived, disappointing and even counterproductive change. As consultants who have grown out of the Church Growth tradition and are seeking to be faithful to Christ's Great Commission, we want to, and need to focus on "the main thing" – *helping to boost the reproductive quotient* of the ministries that invite us to help them to clarify issues and create strategies of hope and vision.

NOTES

¹. Donald McGavran provided this definition in a letter to David Barrett, November 29, 1976, distributed to doctoral candidates at Fuller Theological Seminary. He defined D-1 (discipling) as the initial turning toward Christianity by large numbers of non-Christian groups and D-2 (discipling) as the initial conversion of individuals in a nominally Christian society. D-3 (discipling) is the later stages of individual Christian maturity and does not include new disciples.

². For additional discussion of reproducing new disciples, and factors involved in the process of disciplining, see Gary L McIntosh, *Biblical Church Growth*, Baker, 2003, pp 61-7; George Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, Abingdon, 2000, pp. 7-75; Alan R. Tippett, *Verdict Theology in Missionary Theory*, William Carey, 1973, pp. 79-9; Donald McGavran, *The Bridges of God*, Fortress Press, 1955, pp. 1-16.

³. For additional discussion of reproducing new leaders see C. Peter Wagner, *Changing Church*, Regal, 2004, pp. 119-140; Erwin McManus, *Unstoppable Force*, Group Publishing, 2001, pp. 186-224; Wayne Cordeiro, *Doing Church as a Team*, Regal, 1998, pp. 175-20; Dean S. Gillingland, *Pauline Theology and Mission Practice*, Wipf and Stock, 1998, pp 213-22; M. Alan McMahan, *Training Turn-Around Leaders*, unpublished PhD dissertation at Fuller's School of World Mission, 1998, pp.78-96; Charles Van Engen, *God's Missionary People*, Baker, 1991 pp. 13-178 and *Mission on the Way*, Baker, 1996, pp. 240-252; and R. Daniel Reeves and Ronald Jenson, *Always Advancing, Here's Life*, 1984, pp.22-24.

⁴. For additional discussion on reproducing new units and teams see, Gary McIntosh and Dan Reeves, *Lifegiving Strategies for Robust Ministry*, Kregel, 2005; ,especially Lifegiving system five on team ministry; Kent Hunter, *Move Your Church to Action*, Abingdon, 2000, pp. 26-29; Waldo Werning, *God Says, Move*, Fairway Books, 1997, pp. 29-48; Eddie Gibbs, *Church Next*: InterVarsity Press, 2000, pp. 65-91, *I Believe in Church Growth*, pp 344-356, Eerdmans, 1981; Melvin Hodges, "Developing Basic Units of Indigenous Churches," pp.111-130, in *Church Growth and Christian Mission*, Donald A. McGavran, ed., William Carey, 1976; and Paul Orjala, *Get Ready to Grow*, Beacon Hill Press, pp. 1978.

⁵. The literature on church planting is extensive. Two current texts are Elmer Towns and Douglas Porter, *Churches that Multiply*, Beacon Hill, 2003, pp 137-14; and Ed Stetzer, Broadman and Holman (pp. 317-336). For Dave Ferguson's latest multi-site training events, see www.Newthing.org.